



Charlotte Mason's House of Education,
Scale How, Ambleside, UK, 2009

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the streets, and do we wonder that the girls growl and grumble, and feel "so tired" and disinclined to go out for the short walk? Surely frequent intervals, of five and ten minutes, would be judiciously spent in skipping or playing ball in the back garden, and the lessons be better done. On wet days, too,—when tempers are always a little unhinged,—could "our lassies" not be turned into a big room, and allowed to vent their pent-up feelings in a jolly good romp? I suppose that it would be considered "unladylike" for them to scrub the tables and floor in such a room, if energetically disposed? Still this prescription was of great benefit to the present Queen of Sweden when other medicines failed; and the superintendent of a large imbecile asylum recently told me, that he considered that we must direct our attention to curtailing the amount of brain work for our sane children, and substituting for it all kinds of manual work—scrubbing, carpentering, etc., etc.,—if we would stem the tide which is relentlessly sweeping in upon us, of Anæmia, Hysteria, Brain and Nerve Exhaustion, and all their attendant evils.

EDITORIAL.

"WHAT IS TRUTH?"

It is said that we English are no longer to be characterized as a truth-speaking people. This is a distressing charge, and yet we cannot put it away from us with a high hand. Possibly we are in a stage of civilisation which does not tend to produce the fine courage of absolute truthfulness. He who is without fear is commonly without falsehood; and a nation brought up amid the chivalries of war dares to be true. But we live in times of peace: we are no longer called on to defend the truth of our word by the strength of our hand. We speak with very little sense of responsibility, because no one calls us to account; and, so far as we are truth-tellers, we are so out of pure truth of heart and uprightness of life. That is, we may be, as a nation, losing the habit of truth to which the nation's childhood was trained, in ways however rough and ready; but we are growing up, and the truth that is among us is perhaps of a higher quality than the more general truthfulness of earlier days. Now, truth is indeed the white flower of a blameless life, and not the mere result of a fearless habit. The work before us is to bring up our children to this higher manner of truth. We no longer treat this or that particular lie or bit of deceit as a local ailment, for which we have only to apply the proper lotion or plaster; we treat it as symptomatic, as denoting a radical defect of character which we set ourselves to correct.

Opinion without knowledge, says Darwin, is entirely valueless, and to treat the tendency to untruthfulness that children often show, one should have a good deal of knowledge of a special kind. To treat a child *de novo*, place him under a moral microscope, record our observations, and formulate opinions based upon that child, and as many more as we can get into focus, is, no doubt, useful and important work. But it is work for which we must qualify ourselves. The child is a human being, immature, but yet, perhaps, a human being at his best. Who amongst us has such gifts of

seeing, knowing, comprehending, imagining, such capacities for loving, giving, believing, as the little child in the midst! We have no higher praise for our wisest and best than that they are fresh and keen as little children in their interests and loves.

Now, we maintain that it is not sufficient to bring unaided common sense and good intentions to this most delicate art of child-study. We cannot afford to discard the wisdom of the past and begin anew with the effort to collect and systematise, hoping to accomplish as much and more in our short span than the centuries have brought us.

In this matter of lying, for example, unaided common sense is likely to start upon one of two theses: either the child is born true, and you must keep him so; or, the child is born false, and you must cure him of it. Popular opinion leans strongly to the first theory in these days, and, as we perceive only that which we believe, the tendency is, perhaps, to take the absolute truthfulness and honour of children a little too much for granted. If you would have children true, you must, of course, treat them as if they were true, and believe them to be true. But, all the same, wisdom may not play the ostrich. In the last generation, people accepted their children as born false, and, what more likely to make them so than this foregone conclusion? Possibly some falling off in truthfulness in our day is traceable to the dogmatic teaching upon which our forbears were brought up.

The wisdom of the ages—i.e., philosophy, and the science of the present, especially physiology, and more particularly what we may call psycho-physiology—show us that both these positions are wrong, and that all theories founded upon either position, or upon any midway point between the two, must needs be wrong too. A child is born neither true nor false. He is absolutely without either virtue or vice when he comes into the world. He has tendencies, indeed, but these are no more either virtuous or vicious than is the colour of his eyes. Even the child of a liar is not necessarily born a liar, because, we are assured, acquired tendencies are not transmitted. But there is this to be said. The child born of a family, which has from generation to generation been in a subject position, may have less predisposition to truthfulness than the child of a family which has belonged for generations

to the ruling class. As in the natural world, all substances must be reduced to their elements before they can be chemically dealt with, so in the moral world, if we wish to treat an offence, it is best to trace it to that elemental property of human nature of which it is the probable outcome. Now, lying, even in its worst forms, is by no means elemental. Ambition is elemental, avarice, vanity, gratitude, love and hate. But lying arises from secondary causes. The treatment is all the more difficult. It is no longer a case of—the child has lied, punish him, but where is the weak place in his character, or what is the defect in his education which has induced this lying habit, if it be a habit? How shall we, not punish the lie, but, treat the failing of which it is symptomatic. From this point of view let us consider the extremely interesting classification of lies presented to us in the foregoing paper:—

I. *Pseudophobia*. Janet thinks she may have glanced at Mary's slate, and seen the answer to her sum. A comparison of the two slates shows that she has not done so, and that Janet, in the effort to save herself from a lie, has actually told one. This sort of morbid conscientiousness is Argus-eyed for other forms of sin. We knew a sick girl of fourteen, who was terribly unhappy because she was not able to kneel up in bed when she said her prayers. Was this the "unpardonable sin?" she asked, in unaffected terror. We agree with the writer of the article in question, as to the frequent occurrence of this form of distress, and also in tracing it, not to moral, but to physical causes. We should say, too, it is more common in girls than in boys, and in the home-taught than in the school-taught child. Healthy interests, out-of-door life, engrossing and delightful handiworks, general occupation with things rather than with thoughts, and avoidance of any word or hint that may lead to self-consciousness or the habit of introspection, will probably do much to carry the young sufferer through a difficult stage of life.

II. *The Lie Heroic*. May we venture to add to the judicious remarks under this head that the lie heroic is, par excellence, the school-boy's lie, and has its rise, not in any love for lying, but in a want of moral balance; that is to say, the boy has been left to form his own code of ethics.

Who spilled the ink? little Tom Brown is asked. "I did," he says; because Jack Spender, the real culprit, is his particular hero at the moment. Faithfulness to a friend is a far higher virtue, in Tom's eyes, than mere barren truthfulness. And how, in a word, is Tom to know, if he has not been taught, that it is unlawful to cherish one virtue at the expense of another. Considering how little clear, definite, authoritative teaching children receive on ethical questions, the wonder is that most persons do elaborate some kind of moral code, or code of honour, for themselves.

III. *Truth for friends, lies for enemies.* A lie under this head differs from the lie heroic chiefly in that it need not bring any risk to the speaker. This class of lies again points to the moral ignorance, which we are slow to recognise in children, because we confound innocence with virtue. It is quite natural for a child to believe that truth is relative, and not absolute, and that, whether a lie is a lie or not, is a question of whom you are speaking to. The children are in the position of "jesting Pilate." What is truth? they unconsciously ask.

IV. *Lies inspired by selfishness.* This is a form of lying for which superficial treatment is quite idle. The lie and the vice of which it is the instrument are so allied that those two cannot be put asunder. As Professor Stanley Hall well points out, the school is a fertile field for this kind of lying. But it is the selfishness and not the lying that must be dealt with. Cure the first, and the second disappears, having no further *raison d'être*. How? This is a hard question. Nothing but a strong impulse to the heroism of unselfishness, initiated and sustained by the grace of God, will deliver boy or girl from the vice of selfishness of which lying is the ready handmaid. But let us not despair; every boy and girl is open to such impulse, is capable of heroic effort. Prayer and patience, and watchfulness for opportunities to convey the stimulating suggestion—these will not be in vain. Every boy and girl is a hero *in posse*. There is no worse infidelity than that which gives up the hope of mending any flaw of character, however bad, in a young creature. All the same, happy those parents who have not allowed selfishness and virtue (whether in the form of truthfulness, or under some other name), to come to hand

to hand conflict. It is so easy to give direction to the tendencies of a child; it is so agonisingly difficult to alter the set of character in a man.

V. *The Deception of imagination and play.* I passed little Muriel in the park one day; the child was not looking; her companion was unknown to me. I was engaged with my companion, and believed that Muriel had not noticed me. The little girl went home and told her mother that I had kissed her and asked various questions about the family health. What could be the child's motive? She had none. Her active imagination rehearsed the little dialogue, which most naturally would have taken place, and this was so real to her that it obscured the fact. The reality, the truth, to Muriel, was what she imagined had taken place. She had probably no recollection whatever of the actual facts. This sort of failure in verbal truthfulness is excessively common in imaginative children, and calls for prompt attention and treatment; but not on the lines a hasty and righteous parent might be inclined to adopt. Here is no call for moral indignation. The parents and not the child are in fault. The probability is that the child's ravenous imagination is not duly and daily supplied with its proper meat, of fairy tale in early days, of romance, later. Let us believe of the children that "trailing clouds of glory do they come" from the place where all things are possible, where any delightful thing may happen. Let us believe that our miserable limitations of time and space and the laws of matter irk them inconceivably, imprison the free soul as a wild bird in a cage. If we refuse to give the children outlets into the realms of fancy, where everything is possible, the delicate Ariel of his imagination will still work within our narrow limits upon our poor tasks, and every bit of our narrow living is played over with a thousand variations, apt to be more vivid and interesting than the poor facts, and, therefore, more likely to remain with the child as the facts which he will produce when required to speak the truth. What is the cure? Give the child free entrance into, abundant joyous living in, the kingdom of make-believe. Let him people every glen with fairies, every island with Crusoes. Let him gift every bird and beast with human interests, which he will share when the dear fairy god-mother arrives with an introduction.

Let us be glad and rejoice that all things are possible to the children, recognising in this condition of theirs their fitness to receive and believe and understand, as, alas, we cannot do, the things of the Kingdom of God. The age of faith is a great sowing time, doubtless designed, in the Divine scheme of things, especially that parents may make their children at home in the things of the Spirit before contact with the world shall have materialised them.

At the same time the more imaginative the child, the more essential is it that the boundaries of the kingdom of make-believe should be clearly defined, and exact truthfulness insisted upon in all that concerns the narrower world where the grown-ups live. It is simply a matter of careful education; daily lessons in exact statement, without any horror or righteous indignation about mis-statements, but warm, loving encouragement to the child who gives a long message quite accurately, who tells you just what Miss Brown said and no more, just what happened at Harry's party, without any garnish. Every day affords scope for a dozen little lessons at least and, gradually, the more severe beauty of truth will dawn upon the child, whose soul is already possessed by the grace of fiction.

VI. *Pseudomania*. We have little to add to the wise words on this score, except to counsel parents to keep watch at the place of the letting out of waters. No doubt the condition is pathological, and calls for curative treatment rather than punishment. But we believe it is a condition which never need be set up. The girl who has been able to win esteem for what she really is and really does, is not tempted to "pose," and the boy who has found full outlet for his energies, physical and mental, has no part of himself left to spend upon "humbugging." This is one of the cases which show how important it is for parents to acquaint themselves with that delicate borderland of human nature which touches the material and the spiritual. How spiritual thought and material brain interact; how brain and nerves are inter-dependent; how fresh air and wholesome food affect the condition of the blood which nourishes the nerves; how the nerves again may bear tyrannous sway over all that we include under "bodily health;" these are matters that the parent should know who would avoid the possibility of

the degradation here described as Pseudomania from being set up in any one of his children.

It is as well that those who have to do with young people should be familiar with one or two marked signs of this mentally diseased condition; as, the furtive glance from under half-closed lids, shot up to see how you are taking it all; the flowing recital, accompanied by a slightly absent pre-occupied look, which denotes that the speaker is in the act of inventing the facts he relates.

We have not space to enlarge upon *palliatives*, *lies of terror*, or one or two more classes of lies, which seem to us of frequent occurrence, as, *lies of display* (boasting), *lies of carelessness* (inaccuracy), and, worst of all, *lies of malice* (false witness).

We would only commend the subject to the attention of parents; for, though one child may have more aptitude for these studies than another, neither truthfulness nor the multiplication table come by nature. The child who appears to be perfectly truthful is so because he has been carefully trained to truthfulness, however indirectly and unconsciously. It is more important to cultivate the habit of truth than to deal with the accident of lying.

We are very grateful for this opportunity to place before our readers a study of "children's lies," infinitely pathetic in the moral ignorance it discloses, and the blind reaching after some kind of a guide to truth. When will we understand that moral teaching must be as simple, direct and definite as the teaching which appeals to the intellect; presented with religious sanctions, quickened by religious impulses, but, not limited to the prohibitions of the law nor to the penalties which overtake the transgressor.